

## Nicholas of Lyra's Literal Commentary on Lamentations and Jewish Exegesis: A Comparative Study\*

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### Abstract

The literal commentary of Nicholas of Lyra (France, c. 1270-1349) on the Bible (*Postilla literalis super totam Bibliam*) is one of the most important Christian commentaries that were written according to the literal sense of Scripture. It is also known for its frequent use of Jewish quotations, mainly Rashi's interpretations. This paper presents similarities between Nicholas' own interpretations in the *Postilla* on Lamentations and Jewish exegetical literature on the same book. The paper is based on a comparison between these two kinds of commentaries (Jewish and Nicholas') on the same biblical verses. This comparison reveals interpretations written by Jewish scholars which are similar to those written earlier by Nicholas. The article ends with an attempt to explain this interesting phenomenon of what seems to be a hidden Jewish influence on Nicholas of Lyra.

### Keywords

Middle ages, biblical exegesis, Christian Hebraism, Nicholas of Lyra, Rashi, lamentations, Christians and Jews

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In this paper, verses cited without any specific source are taken from Lamentations. Quotations from the Bible are based on *The Jerusalem Bible* (Jerusalem: Koren, 1992), unless otherwise noted. Biblical quotations within citations from Nicholas of Lyra's work are based on the Vulgate. Quotations from Nicholas of Lyra's commentary are from the Venice edition, 1588: *Biblia sacra cum glossis interlineari et ordinaria, Nicolai Lyrani postilla et moralitatibus, Burgensis additionibus et Thoringi replicis*, vol. 4 (Venice 1588). Significant differences between versions of the *Postilla*, if these exist, are cited in the notes. Quotations from the commentaries of Rashi and Rabbi Joseph Qārā on Lamentations are taken from the series *Miqra'ot G'dolat 'Haketer* of Bar Ilan University (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan

Over the last 50 years, there has been a significant surge in scholarly research on the relationship between Christian and Jewish biblical exegesis in the Middle Ages. The principal aim of this scholarship has been the discovery and analysis of Jewish interpretations which appear in Christian writings and the identification of their sources. Most of the attention has been devoted to those interpretations which Christian commentators themselves identified as Jewish.<sup>1</sup> Little scholarly effort, on the other hand, has been made toward establishing comparisons between Christian and Jewish interpretations for the sake of discovering Jewish material that found its way into Christian texts not explicitly presented as such by Christian compilers or commentators.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly true with regard to the research on the literal commentary on the Bible written by the Franciscan scholar Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349) and its relationship to Jewish exegesis.<sup>3</sup> Nicholas' commentary, also known as *Postilla literalis super totam*

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University, forthcoming). Both the Bar-Ilan edition (ibid.) and the Buber edition (S. Buber, ed., *Pērūsh Rabbi Joseph Qārā 'al M'gilat Ēhā*, Breslau 1898) contain two versions of Rabbi Joseph Qārā's commentary on Lamentations. Alongside each citation used in this essay, the version from which it is taken is noted, based on its designation in the *Keter* edition: Version A, which is parallel to the first version in the Buber edition (Ms. Breslau 1041; ibid., IX-XIX) and edited on the basis of other manuscripts from this textual tradition; or Version B, based on the (the second version in Buber edition (Ms. Munich 5; ibid., XXVII-XLII). When an interpretation of Rabbi Joseph Qārā is presented but not quoted, the specific version is noted only when a difference exists between them.

<sup>1</sup> Studies in this area are numerous; I will cite only a selection: Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 102-104, 149-172, 186-195; Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 1963), 103-134; Gilbert Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les Juifs au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 271-307; Aryeh Grabois, "The *Hebraica veritas* and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century," *Speculum* 50 (1975): 613-634; Rainer Berndt, "Les interprétations juives dans le commentaire de l'heptateuque d'André de Saint-Victor," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 24 (1989): 199-240; Ezra Shershevsky, "Hebrew Traditions in Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 59 (1968-1969): 268-289.

<sup>2</sup> Chen Merchavia conducted research along both these lines, and discussed the similarities between Christian interpretations and Jewish interpretations which were not cited as Jewish, as well as research on interpretations which were cited as Jewish. See Chen Merchavia, *The Church versus Talmudic and Midrashic Literature [500-1248]* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1970), especially chapters 1, 5, 6, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Abraham Michalski's work constitutes an exception. See Abraham J. Michalski, "Raschis Einfluss auf Nicolaus von Lyra in der Auslegung der Bücher Leviticus, Numeri und Deuteronomium" (Ph.D. diss., Wilhelm University: Leipzig, 1915). Michalski has composed a useful list of both Jewish citations and parallels in Jewish sources, though they still await scholarly analysis.

*Bibliam*, was written in Paris in the 1320s. It quickly gained enormous popularity, particularly among biblical scholars in the universities. This was due to its lucid style, to the fact that it encompassed all of the books of the Bible, and to the author's strict adherence to the literal meaning of the biblical text.

In addition to its distinctly literal interpretive style, which made this commentary unique among Christian commentaries, the *Postilla* is also notable for the extent to which it is based on Jewish traditions. Jewish interpretations and quotations from the Hebrew text of the Bible appear relatively frequently and are specifically identified as sources. Moreover, Nicholas frequently mentions the name of the particular commentator he cites; principal among these is Rashi (R. Solomon, son of Isaac, 1040-1105). There are several scholarly studies that deal with Nicholas of Lyra's incorporation of Jewish interpretations into his *Postilla*.<sup>4</sup> As in the case of studies that deal with other Christian exegetes, research on Nicholas of Lyra and his use of Jewish interpretations seems to focus on those interpretations which he presented as Jewish, as they were quite numerous. These studies appear to assume that any interpretation in the *Postilla* that was not presented as Jewish had no affinity at all to Jewish sources.

In this paper I will present interpretations from Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla* on Lamentations which, though not specifically attributed to Jewish sources by the author, in terms of content and, at times, even of wording, present striking parallels to medieval Jewish interpretations. This scholarly undertaking could help to chart a new method of researching Jewish affinities between Nicholas' and Jewish interpretations, since previous

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<sup>4</sup> Hailperin, *Rashi*, 137-264; idem, "Nicolas de Lyra and Rashi: The Minor Prophets," in H. L. Ginsberg, ed., *Rashi Anniversary Volume* (New York, NY: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1941): 115-147; Deeana Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers, Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2007); Sarah Kamin, "The Relation of Nicolas de Lyre to Rashi in his Commentary on Song of Songs," in idem, *Jews and Christians interpret the Bible* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 62-72; Ari Geiger, "In Hebraeo habetur: The Hebrew Biblical Text in the Literal Commentary of Nicholas of Lyra on the Book of Lamentations," *Revue des études Juives* 166 (2007): 147-173; Michalski, "Raschis Einfluss;" J. Neumann, "Influence de Rashi et d'autres commentateurs juifs sur les *Postillae Perpetuae* de Nicolas de Lyre," *Revue des études Juives* 26 (1893): 172-182, 250-262; Felix Maschkowski, "Raschi's Einfluss auf Nicolaus von Lira in der Auslegung der Exodus," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 11 (1891): 268-316.

Other research on different aspects of the *Postilla* can be found in P. D. W. Krey and L. Smith, eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: The Senses of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

scholarship has focused solely on the quotations from Jewish sources found in the *Postilla*, as mentioned above.<sup>5</sup> The Jewish sources to which an exegetical connection is found are those written by Rashi, mentioned above, Rabbi Joseph Qārā (who lived in Northern France between the eleventh and twelfth centuries), and Rabbi Tobias son of 'eli'ezer (who lived in Greece between the eleventh and twelfth centuries), author of the commentary *Leqah Tov*, all of whose commentaries were popular among the Jews who lived in Nicholas' region.<sup>6</sup> I will conclude with a discussion of the possible reasons for these latent connections between the *Postilla* and Jewish exegesis.

One of the facts that must be taken into account in examining the *Postilla* on Lamentations is the relative paucity of Christian commentaries on this book before Nicholas' time. The few that existed were primarily allegorical in nature, which meant that Nicholas could not use them in his literal commentary.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Nicholas' motivation for seeking out literal

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<sup>5</sup> A previous attempt to compare Nicholas' and Jewish interpretations of the Canticles has been undertaken (Kamin, "The Relation of Nicolas de Lyre"), but Kamin's principle focus was on comparing the exegetical methods, with less emphasis on similarities in the content of the exegesis.

<sup>6</sup> Rashi was the best-known Jewish scholar in the Middle Ages, among Jews and the only one known by most Christians. See, for example, Hailperin, *Rashi*, 103-104. Rabbi Joseph Qārā, who lived in France around the time of Rashi, focused on biblical exegesis. On Qārā and his exegetical method, see Moshe M. Ahrend, *Le Commentaire sur Job de Rabbi Yoseph Qara'* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1978); Drori Ganiel, "The Exegetical Method of Rabbi Yosef Kara With Regard to the Prophetic Books" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales, Cardiff, 1993); and Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of France* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), 184-193, 290-291, 359-366.

Rabbi Tobias son of 'eli'ezer lived in Castoria (northern Greece) in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. His commentaries circulated widely in Jewish communities, as noted by Solomon Buber in his introduction to *Leqah Tov*. See S. Buber, ed., *Midrash Leqah Tob Hamehune Pesiqta Zutreta al Hamisha Humshey Torah* (Vilna 1880, repr. Jerusalem 1960), XXIII, 58. On R. Tobias son of 'eli'ezer and his Biblical commentary, see Zvi Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium* (New York, NY: Columbia University, 1959), 261ff., 330-334.

<sup>7</sup> The only known commentary on Lamentations from the patristic period is that of Origen (185-254), to which Eusebius (260-339) testifies. This commentary was not translated into Latin and it survived in the *Catena*; see E. Ann Matter, "The Lamentations Commentaries of Hrabanus Maurus and Paschasius Radbertus", *Traditio* 38 (1982): 139-140. The most notable commentaries were written in the Carolingian period, namely those of Rabanus Maurus (776-856), for which see J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* (henceforth PL), Vol. 111, 1181D-1271C, and Paschasius Radbertus (785-860), for which see Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Lamentationes Hieremiae Libri Quinqve*, ed. B. Paulus, CCCM 85 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988). Regarding these commentaries, see

Jewish exegesis when writing his *Postilla* was far greater in his commentary on Lamentations than for those of other biblical books. The Jewish commentaries on Lamentations that we are familiar with from before Nicholas' time were also relatively few in number,<sup>8</sup> but amongst them Nicholas would have been able to find literal interpretations of the sort that he was seeking. Indeed, as I have observed, in his commentary on Lamentations (as in the other parts of the *Postilla*) Nicholas quotes Jewish interpretations, all of which he attributes to Rashi.<sup>9</sup>

### Historical Background

Despite the enmity that existed between Jews and Christians from the beginning of medieval times, as well as the vast gulf between the intellectual activities of each, it was not unusual to find Christian scholars who cited Jewish sources in their works. Jerome, who coined the phrase *Hebraica veritas* (the Hebrew truth), was regarded as the progenitor of Christian Hebraists.<sup>10</sup> Jerome was followed by other biblical scholars, such as Rabanus

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E. Ann Matter, "Lamentations Commentaries;" Bat-Sheva Albert, "Anti-Jewish Exegesis in the Carolingian Period: The Commentaries on Lamentations of Hrabanus Maurus and Pascasius Radbertus," *Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages, Proceedings of the Conference, Gargnano on Lake Garda, 24–27 June 2001*, eds. C. Leonardi and G. Orlandi (Firenze: SISMEL, 2005), 175–192.

From the eleventh and twelfth centuries we have many commentaries, such as the *Glossa Ordinaria* by Gilbert the Universal. A partial edition of this commentary was recently published, see Gilbertus Universalis, *Glossa Ordinaria in Lamentationes Ieremie Prophete, Prothemata et Liber I*, ed. A. Andrée, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Studia Latina Stockholmiensis (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 2005). For a list of other commentaries written in this period, see *Glossa Ordinaria*, 56.

<sup>8</sup> The well-known Jewish commentaries from this period are those of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rabbi Joseph Qārā and R. Tobias ben 'eli'ezer. In addition, there are collections of *midrashim*—*Lam. Rabbah* and *Lam. Zutta* (which partly overlaps *Lam. Rabbah*). Other medieval Jewish commentators on Lamentations are R. 'eli'azar of Worms (Germany, ca. 1165–1230), R. Isaiah di Trani (Italy, b. c. 1200) and R. Joseph Kaspi (Provence, 1279–1340).

<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that all of the Jewish interpretations cited in the *Postilla* on Lamentations are attributed to Rashi, the wording of some of these interpretations bears greater similarity to other versions of the same interpretations written by other Jewish commentators, such as Rabbi Joseph Qārā and Rabbi Tobias ben 'eli'ezer. See A. Geiger, "Jewish Sources of Nicholas of Lyra's Literal Commentary on Lamentations" (in Hebrew) (M.A. diss., Bar Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, 2002), 114–117.

<sup>10</sup> See Charles T. R. Hayward, *Saint Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis* (Oxford:

Maurus (776–856), who incorporated Jewish sources into his own commentary,<sup>11</sup> and Theoldulf of Orleans (d. 821), who used the Hebrew Bible in editing his version of the Vulgate.<sup>12</sup> This trend reached its peak in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and owed much to rationalization of the biblical study that had occurred during the twelfth, which had significantly strengthened the literal school of Christian exegesis. The most notable biblical exegetes of that trend were the scholars of St. Victor (Hugh of St. Victor, 1090–1141, and especially his disciple Andrew, d. 1176).<sup>13</sup> Biblical scholars turned to Jewish exegesis because of the lack of earlier literal Christian exegesis, and also because of their awareness of the Jews' advantage of being able to understand the biblical text in the Hebrew original.

Many obstacles had impeded the transmission of Jewish scholarly material from the medieval Jewish school to the Christian cloister and university, due to the absence of any official shared framework of learning. Reading and understanding original Jewish material demanded a high degree of mastery of the Hebrew language, as well as of specific rabbinic

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Clarendon, 1995), 92–99; Adam Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship and the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 41–81; Sarah Kamin, “The Theological Significance of the *Hebraica Veritas* in Jerome’s Thought,” in idem, *Jews and Christians*, 1\*–11\*.

<sup>11</sup> Avrom Saltman, “Rabanus Maurus and the Pseudo-Hieronymian *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Libros Regum et Paralipomenon*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 43–76.

<sup>12</sup> Avrom Saltman, *Pseudo-Jerome, Quaestiones on the Book of Samuel* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 4–11.

<sup>13</sup> See Smalley, *The Study*, 102–106, 149–172, 186–195; Frans van Liere, “Andrew of St. Victor, Jerome, and the Jews: Biblical Scholarship in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance,” in T. J. Heffernan and T. E. Burman, eds., *Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 123 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 59–75; Rainer Berndt, “L’influence de Rashi sur l’exégèse d’André de Saint-Victor,” in Z. A. Steinfeld, ed., *Rashi Studies* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1993), vii–xiv; idem, “Les interprétations juives dans le commentaire de l’heptateuque d’André de Saint-Victor,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 24 (1989): 199–240. On other Christian Hebraists in the twelfth and thirteenth Century, see Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens*, 263–268, 289–302; idem, “Les interprétations juives dans les commentaires bibliques des maîtres parisiens du dernier tiers du XIIe siècle,” *Michael, On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora* 12 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1991), 85–110; Beryl Smalley, “An Early Twelfth Century Commentator on the Literal Sense of Leviticus,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 36 (1969): 78–99; Deborah L. Goodwin, “Take Hold of the robe of a Jew,” *Herbert of Bosham’s Christian Hebraism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Louis H. Feldman “The Jewish Sources of Peter Comestor’s Commentary on Genesis in His *Historia Scholastica*,” in D. A. Koch and H. Lichtenberger, eds., *Begegnungen Zwischen Christentum und Judentum in Antike und Mittelalter*, *Festschrift für Heinz Schreckenberg* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 93–121.

terminology. Although some original Hebrew material had been translated into Latin,<sup>14</sup> this material was frequently flawed by distortions that had crept in owing either to the translator's limited understanding of the Hebrew source or deliberate changes made by him. The only other access to this material was through the assistance of converts who had joined the ranks of the church and could thus place their knowledge of Hebrew and rabbinical literature at the service of the church.<sup>15</sup> This type of study, however, was entirely dependent on the level of knowledge and understanding of the person teaching the material, as well as on his memory: in order to transmit the Jewish sources correctly, the convert had to remember them properly despite the considerable amount of time which had passed, in many cases, since he had left the Jewish religion and since his last physical or visual contact with those sources.

With regard to Nicholas of Lyra, theoretically there are several ways by which he could have studied Jewish sources. Because Nicholas never provides us with any information about this, scholars have advanced a number of conjectures based on biographical data, historical incidents, and evidence contained in his writings. Some have suggested that Nicholas studied Jewish exegesis orally, through contact with Jewish scholars of Evreux, which is not far from his native village of Lyra.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, since Nicholas' education in Jewish exegesis was extremely broad (it included interpretations of the entire Old Testament), it is implausible that he had learned such a large corpus in the short time that elapsed between his entry into the monastery of Verneuil (1300) and his departure for Paris

<sup>14</sup> See n. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens*, 249-250. A blatant example of this would be Nicholas Donin and Thibaud of Sézanne, who played an important role in the "Talmud Trial" (Paris 1240) and in the composition of the anthology named *Extractiones de Talmud*, which consists of Jewish sources translated into Latin. See Gilbert Dahan, "Les Traductions latines de Thibaud de Sézanne," in idem and E. Nicolas, eds., *Le Brûlement du Talmud à Paris, 1242-1244* (Paris: Peeters, 1999), 100-106. See also Yosef H. Yerushalmi, "The Inquisition and the Jews of France in the Time of Bernard Gui," *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970) 356; Avrom Saltman, "Rabanus Maurus:" 43-75. Not only converts, but Jews as well, assisted Christian scholars such as Jerome in familiarizing themselves with the Jewish sources that they later included in their commentaries. See Grabois, "The *Hebraica veritas*:" 615-618; Avrom Saltman, ed., *Stephen Langton, Commentary on the Book of Chronicles* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1978), 31.

<sup>16</sup> Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers*, 8, 107. Copeland Klepper shows that even in his early writings, composed in the first decade of the fourteenth century, Nicholas draws on Jewish sources.

(c. 1301). Moreover, given the significant presence of this material in his commentary, composed in the 1320s, it is difficult to imagine that Nicholas could have relied exclusively on Jewish sources transmitted in an oral context almost 30 years earlier. In addition to the oral channel, we clearly must give serious consideration to the possibility of Nicholas' having consulted written Jewish sources. We know, moreover, of manuscripts containing Jewish interpretations edited and translated into Latin. In addition, scholars have found manuscripts containing Christian biblical interpretations of the Hebrew text of the Bible (as opposed to the Vulgate, almost exclusively used by Christians).<sup>17</sup> Thus, it is at least possible that Nicholas used a written commentary.

As noted, however, these early works which appeared to reflect Jewish biblical exegesis were not particularly accurate with regard to the Jewish sources. Because Nicholas' command of Hebrew was fairly good,<sup>18</sup> the scholarly consensus has been that Nicholas read Jewish materials (at least Rashi's commentary) in Hebrew manuscripts.<sup>19</sup> In an unpublished study based on a close comparison of the quotations from Jewish works in the *Postilla* and the parallel Jewish texts, however, I argue that it is unlikely that

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<sup>17</sup> See Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, *Les manuscrits hébreux dans l'Angleterre médiévale, étude historique et paléographique* (Paris: Peeters, 2003); Raphael Loewe, "Hebrew Books and 'Judaica' in Medieval Oxford and Cambridge," in J. M. Shaftesley, ed., *Remember the Days, Essays on Anglo-Jewish History presented to Cecil Roth* (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1966), 30; idem, "The Medieval Christian Hebraists of England, *The Superscriptio Lincolniensis*," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957): 205-252; idem, "Latin Superscriptio MSS on Portions of the Hebrew Bible other than the Psalter," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 9 (1958): 68-70; Smalley, *The Study*, 341-342, 347-348; Gilbert Dahan, "Deux psautiers hébraïques glosés en latin," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 158 (1999): 61-87; idem, "Un dossier latin de textes de Rashi autour de la controverse de 1240," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 151 (1992): 321-336; A. Saltman and S. Kamin, eds., *Secundum Salomonem: A Thirteenth Century Latin Commentary on the Song of Solomon* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> Hailperin, *Rashi* 144, 290 n. 71. Others, however, dispute this, claiming that Nicholas' command of Hebrew was poor. See the references listed in *ibid.*, and Michael A. Signer, "Vision and History: Nicholas of Lyra on the Prophet Ezechiel," in Krey and Smith, *Nicholas of Lyra*, 152; Avrom Saltman, "Nicholas of Lyra's Commentary on the Book of Ruth" (in Hebrew), in U. Simon, ed., *Studies in Bible and Exegesis* (2 vols.; Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1986) 2. 260. Gilbert Dahan's recent research has produced results consistent with Hailperin's opinion on this issue (personal communication from Gilbert Dahan).

<sup>19</sup> Hailperin, *Rashi*, 339 n. 553; 318 n. 308; 351 n. 738; Henri Labrosse, "Oeuvres de Nicolas de Lyre," *Etudes Franciscaines* 19 (1908): 372, and n. 10; Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers*, 49-50; Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens*, 268.



he read these texts alone or without assistance in such manuscripts as those discussed above. Rather, I believe it likely that he relied on a Jew—or, as is perhaps more likely, on a converted Jew—<sup>20</sup> for assistance.<sup>21</sup> It is also not implausible that, in addition to his assistance with reading, translation and interpretation, this putative Jew (or former Jew) also imparted additional material to Nicholas orally, based on memory.

Nicholas' attitude towards the Jewish materials he quotes is complex. The very fact that he made explicit and frequent use of rabbinic literature, at a time when Jews and their literature were denigrated and persecuted in Christian Europe,<sup>22</sup> attests to his relative openness. In most cases Nicholas accepts the Jewish commentary or textual variant he presents, sometimes in preference to a Christian commentary or even a patristic tradition.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, as the author of two anti-Jewish polemics, he also employed the standard arguments and vocabulary of that genre when attacking the Jews and rabbinic literature.<sup>24</sup> This tendency is also evident in his literal

<sup>20</sup> It should be remembered that the Jews were being expelled from France at the time that the *Postilla* was written, and that some expulsions had taken place even earlier (1306-1315, 1322). Even though there is no proof that all Jews left France at this time (see Elizabeth A. T. Brown, "Philip V, Charles IV and the Jews of France: The Alleged Expulsion of 1321," *Speculum* 66 (1991): 293-324, and *ibid.*, nn. 1-3), it is nonetheless clear that their numbers declined. Moreover, as a result of anti-Jewish policy, there was an increase in the number of Jews who converted to Christianity. See Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century* (2 vols.; New York: Harmon Press, 1966-1989), 2. 309-310, 315-316 and 315 n. 2; Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, 8 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1988-1991), 7. 353-354.

<sup>21</sup> This theory is advanced by Deena Copeland Klepper (*The Insight of Unbelievers*, 8), although, as noted, she herself tends to the view that Nicholas read Rashi in the original.

<sup>22</sup> See Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1982), 51-77, 103-191; Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1989); Yerushalmi, "The Inquisition;" Judah M. Rosenthal, "The Talmud on Trial," *JQR* 47 (1956), 58-76, 145-169; Dahan and Nicolas, *Le Brûlement du Talmud*.

<sup>23</sup> Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers*, 43-46.

<sup>24</sup> In both his exegetical and his polemical works, Nicholas repeated common Christian stereotypes: the Jews as the killers of Christ; Jewish exile as a punishment for this sin; the false expectations of the Jews for future salvation; the Church as the heir of the Synagogue as the chosen people; deliberate distortions of the biblical text by the Jews in order to hide the Christological allusions in the Old Testament. In addition, he used insulting terminology, taken from the standard Christian vocabulary of his time, to describe the common character of the Jews, highlighting, for example, their supposed blindness, stubbornness and stupidity. These characteristics, according to Nicholas, were particularly apparent in

commentary, in which he challenges the rabbinic tradition concerning certain verses and theological points, mainly Christological in nature, that were matters of dispute between Judaism and Christianity.<sup>25</sup> In other passages, Nicholas rejects Jewish interpretations for purely exegetical reasons.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it seems that his recourse to Jewish traditions stemmed from his recognition of their value and superiority in the domain of literal exegesis, as well as from a lack of choice, given the paucity of available Christian literal commentaries. This approach coexisted with Nicholas' negative stance toward Judaism from the spiritual perspective, motivated by the Jews' refusal to accept the Christian faith which, in Nicholas' opinion, served as evidence of their blindness and stubbornness.<sup>27</sup>

### Exegetic Parallels between Nicholas' Interpretations and Jewish Sources

A review of Nicholas' various interpretations of the verses in the Book of Lamentations and a comparison between them and literal Jewish interpretations reveals many similarities. However, great caution must be exercised when attempting to establish a connection between two different exegetical traditions merely on the basis of these similarities. Consequently, I have excluded those interpretations which are trivial, whether because the text being explained is relatively easy to understand,<sup>28</sup> or because of the broader

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the Jew's rejection of Jesus' claims to be the Messiah. Concerning these issues, see Deanna Copeland Klepper, "Nicholas of Lyra's *Quaestio de adventu Christi* and the Franciscan Encounter with Jewish Tradition in the Late Middle Ages" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 1995); Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers*; Cohen, *The Friars*, 170-191.

<sup>25</sup> On Nicholas' Anti-Jewish polemics, see Hailperin, *Rashi*, 148-149, 151-153, 157-184; Cohen, *The Friars*, 170-191.

<sup>26</sup> See Ari Geiger, "Exegetical Critique against Jewish Interpretations in Nicholas of Lyra's Literal Commentary" (in Hebrew), *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 18 (2008): 227-248.

<sup>27</sup> Deana Copeland Klepper's book on Nicholas of Lyra and his Jewish sources concentrates on his complex treatment thereof and the outlook that made it possible. See especially Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers*, chapters 3, 4.

<sup>28</sup> For example, 2:20 states: "Behold, O Lord, and consider to whom thou hast done this; shall the women eat their fruit, their cherished babes? Shall priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?". Since the chapter in general, and the first part of the verse in particular, describes events from the siege of Jerusalem and the battle over it, the end of the verse must be interpreted as referring to the priests who were slain in the Temple by the

context in which it appeared, which demanded that it be explained in a particular way.<sup>29</sup> As we are dealing with literal exegesis, which endeavors to adhere as closely as possible to the language of the text, it is only natural that when a text does not leave much room for interpretation, different commentators will offer similar interpretations. In addition, there are instances in which the Latin text upon which Nicholas based his commentary had already incorporated the Jewish interpretation that is parallel to that of Nicholas, in which case the exegetical connection must be attributed to the Latin translation and not to the *Postilla*.<sup>30</sup> Obviously, I have not included interpretations which were found in Christian commentaries that predated Nicholas.<sup>31</sup> Such commentaries cannot serve as proof of a connection between Jewish exegesis and the commentary of Nicholas of Lyra.

After excluding the above-mentioned interpretations, there still remain a considerable number of interpretations that demonstrate a clear exegetical connection. At times, even the wording of the interpretation is similar, to the extent that one might even believe it to be a direct quotation from the source. This can be seen in the following example from verse 1:15: “the Lord hath trodden the winepress for the virgin daughter of Judah:”

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Babylonian enemy. Qārā interprets it in this manner (p. 17), and the same interpretation appears in the *Postilla* (p. 187H). The legend that appears in Rashi, concerning the slaying of Zechariah son of Jehoiada by his own people, is not consistent with the *literal* meaning of the verse.

<sup>29</sup> For example, verse 4:17: “As for us, our eyes do yet fail for our vain help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save.” Against the background of the description in Jer. 37:5–10 of the false hopes of King Sedecias and his aides for help from the Egyptian army that left Egypt but ultimately returned, it would be difficult not to explain the verse in Lamentations in terms of this event. And indeed, all three exegetes—Nicholas (p. 198D), Rashi and Qārā (p. 29)—interpret the verse in this manner.

<sup>30</sup> For example, the Hebrew text of verse 2:8 states: “... he made the rampart (*hēl*) and the wall (*hōmā*) to lament.” The combination of the words *hēl* and *hōmā* is interpreted by (see n. 8) Rashi, based on ancient explanation (*Lam. Rabbah* 2:8; S. Buber, ed., *Midrash Echa Rabbati* (Vilna: Ram, 1899), 114), as “a large wall and a small wall, a low wall opposite a high wall.” Nicholas, who uses the same idea, is in fact adhering to the Latin translation which includes this explanation: “luxitque antemurale et murus pariter dissipatus est.”

<sup>31</sup> For example, the commentaries of Rabanus Maurus, Paschasius Radbertus and Gilbert the Universal. See n. 7.

**Postilla 1:15****the Lord hath trodden the winepress:**

Because, just as in a winepress the wine is squeezed from the grapes, so in the destruction of Jerusalem the blood of the Jews flowed.<sup>32</sup>

**Leqah Tov 1:15****the Lord hath trodden the winepress for the virgin daughter of Judah:**

Just as in a wine press the grapes are trampled and the wine flows from them, in the same manner the Lord brought the nations upon Israel, and they trampled them and their blood was spilled like water...<sup>33</sup>

In this example, although the two interpretations are similar in content, the exegetical connection between them is not based on this aspect. Interpreting the treading of grapes in a winepress as a metaphor for slaughter is quite expected, in view of the prophecy in Isa. 63:1–6, which likens Divine vengeance on the nations to treading grapes in a winepress. The more specific reference to blood that flowed during the slaughter also appears in this prophecy (verse 3). What links the two commentaries is the similarity in their wording. First, their syntax is identical:—*k<sup>a</sup>shēm she... kākḥ* (“just as... so”) in the *Leqah Tov*, and *sicut... sic* (“just as... in the same manner”)—in the *Postilla*. Secondly, both contain a historical description that connects the language of the verse to an episode in the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem.

At first glance this does not seem to merit the designation “literal interpretation,” given that the verse deals with one context (the treading of grapes in a winepress), whereas the commentary diverges into quite a different domain (the massacre of the people in Jerusalem). To understand why Nicholas nevertheless treats it as literal exegesis, we must consider how scholars of the fourteenth century defined this term. In the twelfth century, questions began to be asked concerning the boundaries between the different senses of the Holy Scriptures. For example, in the case of a parable, does the tenor<sup>34</sup> belong to the allegorical or the literal sense? Is the explication of a metaphor a spiritual or a historical interpretation?

Various answers were given to these questions. Hugh of St. Victor saw the tenor as part of the literal interpretation, whereas Andrew of St. Victor restricted the domain of the latter and excluded the tenor from it.<sup>35</sup> Hugh

<sup>32</sup> “**Torcular calcavit dominus.** Quia sicut in torculari de uvis exprimitur vinum, sic in destructione Ierusalem fuit effusus sanguis Iudaeorum (182H).”

<sup>33</sup> P. 20.

<sup>34</sup> “Tenor” is the subject of a metaphor, e.g., “she” in “she is a rose”.

<sup>35</sup> Smalley, *The Study*, 94, 169–170.

distinguished different levels of the literal interpretation: grammatical analysis of words, the semantic meaning of a word, and the deep meaning of the entire phrase.<sup>36</sup> Over time this led to the consolidation of a broader definition of literal exegesis, based on the author's intention; in the case of Scripture, it was necessary to consider the intention of the human author of each book. This necessity derived from the assumption that the human authors of the biblical books expressed themselves in various fashions, sometimes in "normal" speech and sometimes in the figurative language appropriate to poetry. This, in turn, spawned the notion of the *duplex sensus literalis* (literally, "double literal sense"), composed of the simple literal sense (*sensus literalis*) and the parabolic sense (*sensus parabolicus*).<sup>37</sup>

This view was adopted by Nicholas. He too understood the literal sense of Scripture as subordinate to the author's intention (the title of the second introduction to the *Postilla literalis* is "*De intentione auctoris et modo procedendi*"). His commentaries usually focus on classic literal issues—glosses of words and names, literal readings of a verse or passage, historical background, etc. But when he encounters a text that is prophetic, lyrical, or aphoristic, rather than narrative, he permits himself to go beyond this territory to expound the idea that the author sought to present in his parable or vision. Nicholas discusses this phenomenon in the introduction to his moral commentary, where he says, citing Cassian, that some verses and even entire sections have no simple literal meaning; rather, that they are to be understood only as allegories and not according to their literal sense.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 94. This was an application of the Augustinian principle of a distinction between the words of the text (*voces*) and the things (*res*) designated by them. See A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, eds., *Medieval Literary Criticism and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 66, 203-204.

<sup>37</sup> This notion is usually attributed to Aquinas. See Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (London: Scolar, 1984). For Aquinas' remarks on the subject, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (pars 1, quae. 1, art. 9), ed. T. Gilby, vol. 1 (London: Blackfriars, 1964), 32-40. Some scholars dispute this attribution, though, and maintain that Aquinas recognized only one literal sense. See Smalley, *The Study*, 300 & n. 3; Mark Zier, "Nicholas of Lyra on the book of Daniel," in Krey and Smith, *Nicholas of Lyra*, 192 n. 46.

<sup>38</sup> 4E. Nicholas' examples are Jotham's parable (Judg. 15-9:8) and Matt. 5:30: "And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee...". This principle can be found in Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon, de studio legendi*, ed. C. H. Buttner (Washington, DC: The Catholic University, 1939), 127-128. Nicholas presents the concept of the double literal sense as one of the keystones of scriptural exegesis in the second introduction to the *Postilla literalis*. On the double literal sense in the work of Nicholas of Lyra, see James S. Preus, *From Shadow to Promise, Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young*

Initially he refers to the parabolic sense as “spiritual,” but later he explains that some scholars include it as part of the literal sense and that he has done the same in his commentary.

This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the *Postilla* on Isaiah and Psalms, where Nicholas maintains that some prophecies are to be understood as alluding to Jesus according to their literal meaning (*ad litteram*).<sup>39</sup> It is even more apparent in his commentary on Canticles. Nicholas reads the entire book as a historical allegory, based on the assumption, taken for granted in his day and age,<sup>40</sup> that the work was not intended as an epithalamium. Its author’s intention was believed to have been more profound: according to Nicholas, it was to recount the story of the love between Israel (both the old and new) and God, using the allegorical device of a pair of lovers. In such a case, the historical tenor—the parabolic sense—constitutes the appropriate literal interpretation.<sup>41</sup> Lamentations, too, is poetical in nature and incorporates many metaphors. Given Nicholas’ understanding of the term “literal commentary,” we can state categorically that he considered exegesis that treats some parts of the text as metaphor to be the appropriate form of literal interpretation for a text of that nature.

Connections between the interpretations in the *Postilla* and Jewish interpretations can be found even when their wording is not similar. An affinity exists when there is an identical exegetical idea that goes beyond the straightforward interpretation and basic explanation to be derived directly from the text, that is, when there is an identical unique interpretation or added explanation used to clarify a certain point in the text. An example of this can be found in the *Postilla* on 3:47: “Fear and the pit are

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Luther (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1969), 67-71; Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers*, 33-36; Theresa Gross-Diaz, “What’s a Good Soldier to Do? Scholarship and Revelation in the Postills on the Psalms,” in Krey and Smith, *Nicholas of Lyra*, 111-128; Mary Dove, “Literal Senses in the Song of Songs,” in Krey and Smith, *Nicholas of Lyra*, 129-146; Philip Krey, “The Apocalypse Commentary of 1329: Problems in Church History,” in Krey and Smith, *Nicholas of Lyra*, 267-288.

<sup>39</sup> Hailperin, *Rashi*, 163-167, 177-179.

<sup>40</sup> Ann E. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved, The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1990); David M. Carr, “The Song of Songs as a Microcosm of the Canonization and Decanonization Process,” in A. Van der Kooij and K. Van der Toorn, eds., *Canonization and Decanonization, Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religion (LISOR), Held at Leiden 9-10 January 1997* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 173-183.

<sup>41</sup> Dove, “Literal Senses;” Saltman and Kamin, *Secundum Salomonem*, 10-15.

come upon us, desolation and destruction.” The verse uses a pair of words to describe the forlorn state of the lamenter and his surroundings. In addition to the explanation of the words *paḥad vāḥat* (fear and the pit), Nicholas also describes a dynamic process in which a situation of “fear” deteriorates into the misfortune of the “pit:”

**Fear and the pit:** meaning, in the course of fleeing out of fear of one danger, we came face to face with another. This was because Sedecias, fearing slavery, rebelled against the King of Babylonia. As a result, he was taken captive, his eyes were gouged out, the land was plundered and Jerusalem was destroyed.<sup>42</sup> (*Postilla* 3:47)

This idea of a descent from fear to the pit appears, likewise, in Rashi and in Qārā:

**Rashi 3:47**

**Fear and the pit:** when we fled from fear we fell into the pit.

**Qārā (version B) 3:47**

**Fear and the pit are come upon us:** he who flees from the voice of fear shall fall into the pit...<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, Nicholas’ interpretation contains an addition that does not appear in the Jewish interpretations: mention of the historical facts to which the verse refers. However, it is impossible to ignore the unique exegetical idea that links these three interpretations. It appears to be based on Isa. 24:17-18 and Jer. 48:43-44.<sup>44</sup> The passages in both these sources contain the unusual pair of words *paḥad* (fear) and *paḥat* (pit) and explain the relationship and dynamics between them. The state of *paḥad* (fear) leads the fearful individual into the *paḥat* (pit) and, thus, into an even more difficult situation.

Sometimes the affinity between the different exegetes lies in their common need to clarify a certain matter so that it will be understood by

<sup>42</sup> **Formido et laqueus:** id est ex formidine fugientes unum periculum cecidimus in aliud, Sedecias enim formidans servitutem rebellavit regi Babylonis, ad quod secuta est eius captio et exoculatio, vastatio terrae et Ierusalem contritio (194B).

<sup>43</sup> P. 23. These are the words of Isa. 24:18.

<sup>44</sup> “Fear, and the pit, and the trap, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the land. And it shall come to pass, that he who flees from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that comes up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the trap...” (Isa. 24:17-18); “Terror, and pit, and snare, shall be upon thee, O inhabitant of Mo’av, says the Lord. He that flees from the Terror shall fall into the pit; and he that gets up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare...” (Jer. 48:43-44).

anyone reading the verse. Let us examine the interpretation of verse 2:13: “What shall I take to witness for thee? What shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? For thy breach is great like the sea, who can heal thee”? A comparison between the *Postilla* on this verse and the explanations of Rashi and Rabbi Tobias ben ’eli’ezer reveals that all three felt it necessary to explain why the lamenter sought a historical parallel to the suffering of Jerusalem, as well as the relationship between this suffering and a possible comforting of Jerusalem:

*Postilla* 2:13

[What shall I equal to thee,] that I may comfort thee: For this is the comfort for the misfortune, when there is a companion to the punishment...<sup>45</sup>

## Rashi 2:13

What shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee: When misfortune strikes a person, and he is told: The same came to pass upon so-and-so, this is a comfort to him.

*Leqah Tov* 2:13

What shall I take to witness for thee? What shall I liken to thee?: When a person sees another who is as wretched as he is, he takes comfort in it.<sup>46</sup>

An examination of the works of other commentators reveals that not every commentator felt it necessary to offer an explanation on this point. Some ignored the lamenter’s need for a historical parallel and relied on the reader’s ability to understand the text and fill in the missing information (Qārā, p. 15; Ibn Ezra). Since a comment of this type is neither imperative nor conventional, we can state that there is a connection among these interpretations.

In his interpretation of verse 1:18 (in the Hebrew: “The Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against his word;” in the Vulgate: “Iustus est Dominus quia os eius ad iracundiam provocavi,” The Lord is just, for I have provoked his mouth to wrath), Nicholas again makes a singular point. This time, however, he does not add an explanatory sentence to the core interpretation, but explains the words of the text themselves: “**for I have provoked his mouth to wrath:** this is the transgression of the Law which was given from the mouth of [God] himself (Exod. 20)”<sup>47</sup> (*Postilla* 1:18). It would seem that Nicholas’ reason for interpreting the first section of the

<sup>45</sup> **et consolabor te.** Solatium enim miseri est habere socium in poena... (187B-F).

<sup>46</sup> P. 36.

<sup>47</sup> **Quia os eius ad iracundam provocavi.** Transgrediendo legem ex ore ipsius datam (Exod. 20) (183B).



verse specifically as disobedience to the Law was his need to explain the seemingly strange combination “os eius . . . provocavi” (I have provoked his mouth). What is the meaning of to “provoke his mouth?”

A Jewish commentator who interprets the Hebrew text of the Bible would certainly not need to render a literal interpretation of the word “mouth” in this metaphor. The combination of *pe* (mouth) + the root *m. r. h.* appears several times in the Bible,<sup>48</sup> and indicates disobedience to particular commandments given by God, or to certain prohibitions.<sup>49</sup> In none of these instances is the reference to the disobeying of the entire set of laws given by God, but rather to a specific, one-time commandment.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, this expression in Lamentations can be interpreted in a general way: that the Children of Israel abandoned God’s ways at the end of the First Temple period (by sinning, refusing to listen to the prophets, etc.), and there is no need to focus specifically on disobedience to the entire Mosaic Law. Nevertheless, even Rabbi Tobias ben ’eli’ezer felt it necessary to expound upon the meaning of the word *pe* in this context of rebellion against God’s commandments, and he too solved this problem with the explanation that the verse refers to the entire Law: “**for I have rebelled against his mouth:** I have rebelled against the Law of His mouth”<sup>51</sup> (*Leqah Tov* 1:18).

Another metaphor which is explained in an identical manner by Nicholas, Rashi and Qārā is found in verse 1:2. This verse describes the weeping of a woman (Jerusalem) after she is abandoned by all of her lovers: “She weeps sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies.” One of the questions that arises upon reading this verse is: why was it necessary to provide a description of the tears on the cheeks of the woman? What does this description add to the verse’s opening words (“She weeps sore in the night”), which informs us that Jerusalem is crying? Nicholas’ interpretation appears to address this

<sup>48</sup> Num. 20:24, 27:14; 1 Sam. 12:15; 1 Kings 13:21, 26.

<sup>49</sup> M. Z. Kaddari, *A Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew (Alef-Taw)* (in Hebrew) (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2006), 663.

<sup>50</sup> J. Renkema, *Lamentations*, Historical Commentary of the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 181.

Indeed, *Lam m. Rabbah* 1:18 (Buber, *Midrash Echa Rabbati*, 91) interprets this part of the verse as referring to King Josiah’s refusal to obey God’s command, as conveyed to him by Jeremiah, that he should not go to war against Pharaoh Neco.

<sup>51</sup> A. W. Greenup, ed., *The Commentary of R. Tobia B. Elieser on Echa* (in Hebrew) (London, 1908), 22.

question: “**and her tears are on her cheeks:** this expresses the length and the ongoing nature of the crying.”<sup>52</sup> (*Postilla* 1:2)

Rashi and Qārā give the exact same explanation:

**Rashi 1:2**

**and her tears are on her cheeks:**  
because she is constantly crying.

**Qārā (version A) 1:2**

...but the individual who weeps sore at night will go on his way weeping until his tears lay on his cheeks and he finds none to comfort him. Here, too, the weeping of Zion and the lamentation of Jerusalem is like a woman who weeps sore at night, and because she weeps so much, her tears lay upon her cheeks and she has none to comfort her among all her lovers.<sup>53</sup>

We will conclude with an example of a metaphor that is interpreted in an identical manner by Nicholas and Jewish exegetes in terms of the concrete deed that the metaphor in the verse represents. Verse 1:9 likens Jerusalem to a menstruating woman whose blood is seen by all: “Her uncleanness clings to her skirts. She gave no thought to her future; she has sunk appallingly, with none to comfort her...” (JPS). The word “uncleanness” is clearly a metaphor for sin. But from the context it is unclear whether the reference is to sin in general—that is, the entire array of Jerusalem’s sins—or whether it refers to a specific sin, and if so, which one?<sup>54</sup> Among these possibilities, Nicholas chooses to identify the uncleanness with a specific sin:

**Her uncleanness is on her feet etc.** He (the prophet) talks about her (Zion) as if she was a woman who has begun her monthly cycle, with the uncleanness dripping down and staining the bottom of [her] garment from the inside when it touched her legs. This denotes the uncleanness of idolatry, which was rampant in Jerusalem [and] because of which Jerusalem was destroyed.<sup>55</sup> (*Postilla* 1:9)

<sup>52</sup> **Et lachrymae eius in maxillis eius.** Per hoc designatur continuatio et diuturnitas fletus (179F).

<sup>53</sup> Buber, *Perush Rabbi Joseph Qārā*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> For the different alternatives for identifying the word ‘her uncleanness’ (*tum’atā*) with a particular sin, see Renkema, *Lamentations*, 136.

<sup>55</sup> **Sordes eius in pedibus eius etc.** ... loquitur de ea, sicut de muliere patiente menstrua cuius immunditia descendit ad inferiora, ita quod foedantur orae vestimenti interioris pedes tangentis. et per hoc designatur immunditia idololatriae [sic] abundans in Ierusalem, propter quam fuit destructa (181F).

As mentioned, while the association between uncleanness and the sin of idolatry is an eminently logical one, it is not a necessary association. This relationship between uncleanness and idolatry in the verse under discussion is the juncture between Nicholas' interpretation and a well-known Jewish interpretation that is found in Qārā and in *Leqaḥ Tov*:<sup>56</sup>

**Qārā (version B) 1:9**

**Her uncleanness clings to her skirts:** this means—when she defiled herself with idolatry, She gave no thought to her future...<sup>57</sup>

***Leqaḥ Tov* 1:9**

**Her uncleanness clings to her skirts:** This is the Tophet and the Valley of Ben Hinnom on the outskirts of Jerusalem, where they would burn their sons and daughters to demons.<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusions

I have presented a number of examples from the commentary of Nicholas of Lyra which have a clear affinity to earlier Jewish sources. All of these sources were familiar to the Jews who lived in Nicholas' area. Rashi's commentary was already widely known throughout the Jewish world, and certainly in France where Nicholas lived. Rashi was also familiar to Christian scholars in general, and to Nicholas in particular, and was his preferred Jewish exegete; thus, most of the Jewish interpretations which appear in the *Postilla* are cited as Rashi's interpretations.<sup>59</sup> Rabbi Joseph Qārā, too, was active in France during and after Rashi's time. He knew Rashi and even studied with him. While Qārā's interpretations did not achieve the same popularity as Rashi's, it can be assumed that they were well-known in his own country, whether as his own independent commentaries to the different books of the Bible (only some of which are extant today), or as interpretations which, over the years, were incorporated into the manuscripts of Rashi's commentary and were erroneously deemed to be written by Rashi.<sup>60</sup> The commentary *Leqaḥ Tov* as well, which originated in Greece,

<sup>56</sup> This interpretation appears even earlier in *Lam m. Rabbah* 1:9 (Buber, *Midrash Echa Rabbati*, 71–72), and its wording is similar to that of Rabbi Tobias ben 'eli'ezer.

<sup>57</sup> Buber, *Pērūsh Rabbi Joseph Qārā*, 5. The same idea appears also in Version A: "... and this is its meaning: when she was in a tranquil state, and **her uncleanness clings to her skirts**, meaning that she committed adultery, and the Lord loved the people of Judah, but they turned to idols..." (5–6).

<sup>58</sup> Greenup, *The Commentary of R. Tobia B. Elieser*, 16.

<sup>59</sup> See especially the studies of Hailperin, listed above in n. 4.

<sup>60</sup> In this regard, see Grossman, *The Early Sages of France*, 184, 290–291. This explains

was known in France and Germany (at least among the Jews) during Nicholas' time and received mention by Jewish scholars in these countries.<sup>61</sup> In addition to the interpretations of Rabbi Joseph Qārā, the interpretations of Rabbi Tobias ben 'eli'ezer were also incorporated into Rashi's commentary as a result of the interpretations added by scholars who studied Rashi in the following generations, as well as copyists who incorporated these additions into the text of the commentary.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, in view of the cases examined in this study, can we assume that those interpretations in the *Postilla* that have an affinity to Jewish exegesis came from Jewish sources? The assumption that Nicholas incorporated these interpretations knowingly and directly from Jewish sources seems unacceptable. Had this been the case, why wouldn't Nicholas have attributed them to their Jewish sources, as he did in so many other places in his commentary?<sup>63</sup> A more likely hypothesis is that these interpretations do indeed come from Jewish sources, but that Nicholas obtained them from Christian sources without being aware of their origin. The intellectual encounters which took place between Jews and Christians, which primarily involved the study of the Bible, created a flow of interpretations from Jewish sources into Christian exegesis. We know this unequivocally on the basis of those interpretations that were presented explicitly as Jewish. It is also conceivable that some of the interpretations which the Christians learned from the Jews were not documented in Christian writings as Jewish explanations and consequently, with time, their origin was forgotten. As is well known, medieval authors often refrained from naming their sources of information, for reasons unknown to us.

Nevertheless, we must consider the fact that the field of cultural influences and affinities is evasive and in most cases the facts are more certain

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some of the interpretations in the *Postilla* which are attributed to Rashi, but which do not exist in Rashi's commentary. An example of a commentary which is attributed in the *Postilla* to Rashi but was originally written by Rabbi Joseph Qārā is presented by Michael Signer: Signer, "Vision and History," 154.

<sup>61</sup> Buber, *Midrash Leqah Tov*, 45, 58.

<sup>62</sup> Eleazar Twito, "Traces of *Lekah Tov* in the Text of Rashi's Commentary to the Torah" (in Hebrew), *Alei Sefer* 15 (1989): 37-44.

<sup>63</sup> One could conceivably argue that Nicholas did not reveal the Jewish sources of some of his interpretations in order that his commentary would not appear to include too many Jewish interpretations. This would have caused his commentary to be referred to as a "Jewish commentary," and he would have thus come under attack from the Christian world. But as we are dealing only with actual facts, we will not offer baseless hypotheses.

than their interpretation. Lacking concrete historical documentation, we must rely on circumstantial evidence and search for the most logical and plausible scenario. Therefore one must not reject an alternative scenario which may be the source of the similarities between Nicholas' interpretations and Jewish literature, outlined above (although less plausible, in my opinion)—that is, the possibility of Nicholas having conceived these interpretations on his own, rather than hearing them from some informant. If this scenario were the correct one, this would demonstrate the power of the literal method, which leads scholars from different and even hostile worlds to interpret common texts in identical ways.<sup>64</sup> This, in fact, is the nature of the literal method. It has a neutral and universal basis: the words of the text, the logic of the exegete, and the information which humankind has accumulated in various fields. It is, therefore, not surprising that when different exegetes are confronted with a given verse, along with the exegetical problems it raises, the context in which it is found, its affinity to other biblical texts, and other factors which are taken into account in literal exegesis, all arrive at similar conclusions. This, however, is conditional on whether the verse under discussion is free of theological overtones to which the exegetes owe allegiance, or whether, even though such overtones may be present, they prefer to ignore them and interpret according to purely exegetical criteria. We are aware today, moreover, that the scientific and scholastic currents that produced the twelfth-century "Renaissance" in Christian biblical scholarship also affected Jewish literal exegetes, who used similar exegetical tools and principles.<sup>65</sup> These principles could conceivably have generated identical interpretations in the two camps.

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<sup>64</sup> This statement can be made with certainty about most of the examples presented above. With regard to the parallel between Nicholas' reading of v. 1:9 (p. 181D-F) and Jewish commentaries, one cannot rule out the possibility that a latent anti-Jewish polemical motive led Nicholas to bring up the idolatrous transgressions of the kingdom of Judah. If so, what brought the two camps to the same place was not the literal method, but the random chance of totally different motives.

<sup>65</sup> Michael A. Signer, "*Peshat*, *Sensus Litteralis*, and Sequential Narrative: Jewish Exegesis and the School of St. Victor in the Twelfth Century," in B. Walfish, ed., *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume* (2 vols; Haifa: Haifa University, 1993), 2. 203-216; Sarah Kamin, "Affinities between Jewish and Christian Exegesis in 12th Century Northern France," in idem, *Jews and Christians*, 12\*-26\*. See Note 10 in Elazar Touitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion, Studies in the Pentateuchal Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir* (in Hebrew) (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2003), 30-31; Ari Geiger, "The Commentary of Nicholas of Lyra on Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy" (in Hebrew) (Ph.D. diss., Bar Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, 2006), 281-304.

In this paper I have examined the close relationship that is found between Nicholas of Lyra's commentary on Lamentations and that of Jewish exegetes. Much work still remains to be done by anyone wishing to pursue this path of research, both with regard to other parts of Nicholas of Lyra's commentary, as well as the commentaries of other Christian exegetes. There is (a) good reason to assume that connections of the sort that I have presented will be found in the commentaries of other Christian exegetes who interpreted the Bible in a literal manner.

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